



Alberta Construction Association

September 19, 2014
The Honourable Don Scott
Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education
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Transmitted via email: IAE.Minister@gov.ab.ca

Dear Minister Scott:

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. Alberta's construction industry shares a number of priorities with your Ministry to enhance productivity and competitiveness of the Alberta economy. Our members strive to provide infrastructure to meet the needs of Albertans in a cost effective, environmentally sustainable, and safe manner. Construction is also one of Alberta's largest employers, accounting for approximately one in seven working Albertans.

The Alberta Construction Association speaks for over 2700 member firms across the Province, including general contractors, trade contractors, and suppliers to non-residential construction markets. Our membership features contractors of all sizes and labour affiliations. Seven additional associations with hundreds of contractors in their membership are associate members of ACA.

We are pleased to partner with your Ministry in a number of critical initiatives, including the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board awards ceremony, AITB scholarships, and the Construction Careers Promotion Committee. We appreciated the opportunity to participate earlier this year in the review of the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act.

Apprenticeship

Promotion of apprenticeship is vital to the future success of our industry, and we can celebrate our joint achievements including:

- Significant industry and government investment in shared cost campaigns to underwrite apprentice scholarships
- Industry reimbursement of apprentice tuitions, in the millions of dollars a year
- Industry donations of supplies and equipment each year to our public post-secondary training institutes
- Industry volunteers providing direction to local and provincial advisory committees, and on the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board itself
- Industry funding and in-kind support to Trade Up Construction Careers, CAREERS the next Generation, Skills Alberta and other career promotion initiatives

We appreciated participating in the July 2014 consultation to discuss "Supports for Apprentices" and look forward to your thoughts on how best to invest the funds made available from the Government of Alberta. One initiative to consider would be to support bursaries for tradespeople that wish to pursue their teacher certification.

Serving Members in:

Calgary Edmonton Fort McMurray Grande Prairie Lethbridge Lloydminster Medicine Hat Peace River Red Deer

We believe that Federal Government discussion of promotion of the use of apprentices for public construction projects lacks sufficient data to determine what sectors, if any, are underutilizing apprentices for public construction projects. Indeed, the competitive bidding procurement model used for much public work suggests a strong incentive to maximize the use of apprentices. Some sectors such as roadbuilding of course feature few apprenticeable trades. ACA believes the current dialogue with your Department is a more fruitful approach to promoting apprenticeship and other forms of industry training across all market sectors and trades.

The Association recognizes the quality of training provided by the Government of Alberta through the apprenticeship program and believes the construction industry should make the fullest use of this excellent program. A hallmark of our success is industry leadership through the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board, Provincial and Local Advisory Committees representing all segments of the industry. This system brings together all participants in the construction industry working to ensure excellence in training, free from labour relations debates and agendas. The Alberta Construction Association strongly opposes public funding for private sector delivery of apprentice training, including those facilities managed by unions or employer trusts.

Private sector delivery has the potential to run counter to long standing industry support for neutrality in delivery of apprenticeship training. Private delivery may also create difficulty for apprentices transferring between different programs in that content and even accreditation may start to diverge. Both industry and government have invested heavily in attracting youth to the trades as a form of post-secondary education. Private sector delivery weakens that link, and can start to undo our efforts to have young people choose trades within their post-secondary education options. Severing the tie to post-secondary also weakens the link for learners to move within post-secondary options such as trades, technology or business programs, and engineering.

ACA strongly supports continued public investment in facilities, equipment, and personnel for our colleges and technical institutes for trades and technical training. Industry also invests in buildings and equipment used by our colleges and institutes, and in scholarships and tuition for apprentices. A move to add private sector delivery calls into question the value of these past investments and continued industry investment in the public system.

The United States has neither Alberta's approach nor quality of program, and such fragmentation here would seriously undermine the competitiveness of our industry and our ability to deliver the best infrastructure in North America.

Premier Redford wrote ACA January 23, 2012 and stated that "It is anticipated that the public post-secondary system will meet the technical training demand for the next three to five years". ACA wishes to confirm your views concerning this issue.

ACA also opposes joint labour-employer apprenticeship committees, as the employer retains sole responsibility for the employment relationship and the development of the apprentice.

Transitions from School to Post-Secondary

ACA is seeking your support to assist regional roundtables between industry, school districts, and post secondaries to strengthen career education, work experience, and transition to employment. ACA has just partnered with the College of Alberta School Superintendents to develop the attached guide to best practices in industry – school district partnerships and the roundtables would be used to initiate and / or strengthen partnerships.

Assessing Foreign Workers Qualifications

On the immigration front, ACA appreciates the work undertaken by Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training (AIT) to assess transferability of Irish trades skills for Alberta requirements. We urge that this work be taken a step further and that Irish TFW's holding the recognized Irish FETAC Level 6 credential are able to work in the scope of the equivalent Alberta trade based on the strength of the credential without the requirement to write an AIT exam. This would also eliminate the waiting time for AIT approval for the TFW program.

We are concerned that an Alberta Qualification Certificate is a requirement for optional trades under the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program, and would like to explore alternatives to this. This requirement does not apply to Canadian trained workers. The loss of the employer-nominated stream for trades appears to have reduced the number of applicants, an unintended consequence of the change to self-nomination and we would also like to see the employer-nominated stream reinstated.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you in the coming weeks to further discuss these recommendations, and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Gibson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ken Gibson, Executive Director, for

Scott Matheson
Chairman

Attachment